

# CHILDRENS' GAMES, RHYMES AND TONGUE TWISTERS

## GAMES

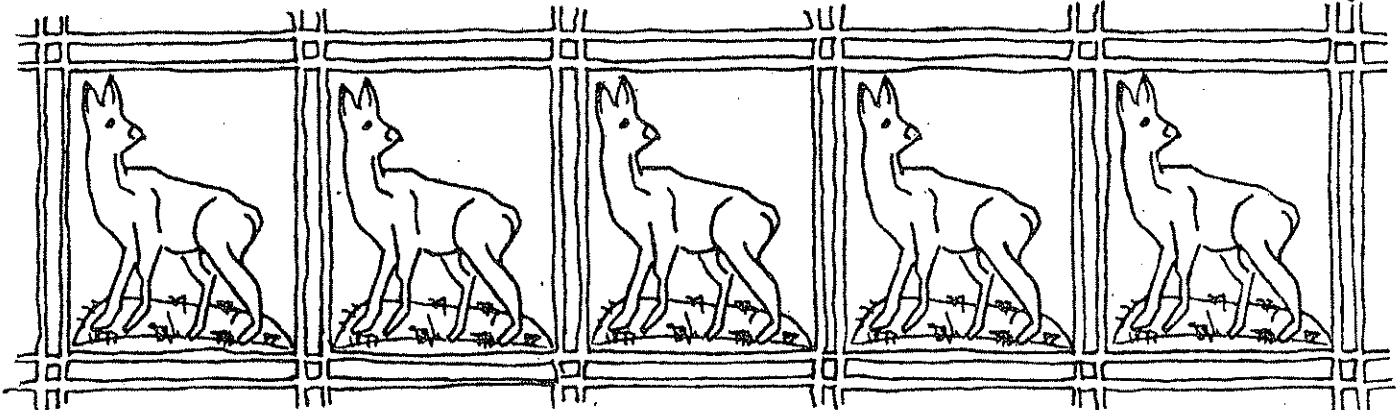
No games were played during the day; children had chores to do and every child had to work. The biggest girls helped their mothers bake and cook and sew, and the small ones washed dishes and scrubbed. Since there was no grass in the yards, only hard-packed dirt, one of the children was responsible for sweeping the yards twice a week during the summer as well as the street in front of the house. Fallen tree limbs, twigs, and drifted straw were gathered up from the streets and were burned behind the houses.

## Magic

Children love magic and one of the popular tricks in Ellis County concerned the disappearance of a "Mänja" and a "Weibja" (a little man and a little woman). When children got together, the one who knew how to perform the magic would say, "Ich wett ich kann a Mänja und a Weibja verschwinden!" (I bet I can make a little man and a little woman disappear.") One of the children would reply, "Ne, des glaaba mir net!" (No, we don't believe you can.") "Setzt eich a mol do him un dann weiss ich eich wie mir des dut." (Sit down around the table and I will show you how it is done.")

The magician then went to another room and patched a piece of newspaper on the forefinger of each hand with saliva. The paper was wrapped around the finger nails. The great magician then placed his forefingers flat on the table with the paper visible to everyone. The paper represented the "Mänja" and "Weibja." Then he threw this right hand over his

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shoulder saying, "Mänja flüh fort." (Little man, fly away.) He returned the hand to the table, but this time with only his middle finger (with no paper on it) showing. Then he threw his left hand over his shoulder crying, "Weibja du aah." (Little woman, you, too.) He returned his left hand to the table and again with only the middle finger showing. (He was hiding the forefingers with the paper on them under his hand.)

The very young children were amazed and marveled at the magic. And now the magician said, "Ich wett ich kann sa widder zurick bringa." (I bet I can bring them back again.) By this time the kids were so amazed they could not speak.

Then the magician reversed the procedure. The right hand went over the shoulder, came back on the table and as he cried, "Manja komm widder," (Little man, come again), he laid the forefinger with the paper attached on the table. He did likewise with his left hand as he said, "Weibja du aah," (You too, little woman). The spectators could again see the paper attached to his fingers. The young children were delighted and wondered how this magic was done.

As in all magic, there were a few times when the trick didn't work, because the paper did not stick tight enough to the finger, and was lost during the performance. In that case, the magician went back to the other room and reinforced the paper with more saliva to make sure it would stick a second time.

#### Ringel - Ringel - Rosja: Curl, Curl, Rosie

A group of children would sit on chairs with their hands cupped in their laps in such a fashion that there was a small opening on top of the cupped hands in which a little object could be dropped in without anyone being aware of it. The "It" person had something like a button or thimble in his own cupped hands and, extending his hands together with the object in them, walked from person to person placing his cupped hands in to the opening of the cupped hands of the persons playing the game. He or she did this to every player, and at some point dropped the object into one of the players' hands. No one knew when this happened except the person who received the object and the one who dropped it.

The idea of the game, after the "It" person had gone around to each of the players, was to guess in whose hands the small object had been dropped. Naturally, the person who had the object had to play dumb and would even get into the guessing game - until someone correctly guessed who had the object. He then became the "It" person, taking the object into his own cupped hands, and making the trip around the room of players all over again.

As the object made the rounds a little rhyme was said: "Ringel, Ringel, Rosja, hall fest zu dei Schosja." Curl, Curl, Rosie, hold your lap tight together.

#### Fingerhut Versteckeljer or Blin'e Mäus: Hide the Thimble

The players all faced against the wall or had to go to another room while the person who was "It" hid the thimble. The players were then allowed to come into the room or turn around - whichever the case - and begin the search. If one of the searchers came close to the thimble the "It" person would shout "Heiss" or "hot", adding to the confusion of the game because the searchers were not sure who was "hot" or close to finding the thimble. If the searchers had a lot of trouble finding the thimble, the "It" person would shout "Kalt" or "cold", meaning they were no where near the object. This helped to speed up the search.

#### Blinda Meischen: Blind Mice

The "It" child of the game was blindfolded and stood in the center of a circle of other children. The blindfolded child would then feel the facial features and hair of the other children - from the neck up only - and try to guess who the person was whom she or he was examining. After making a guess, if it was wrong, the "It" person went on to the next child until he correctly guessed who the person was. While the blindfold was being put on, the players changed places to further confuse the "It" person. This game frequently went on for several hours.

#### Hasja: Little Rabbit

Young children made a circle around a small depression which was the bunny's burrow. One child was the bunny and squatted in the center of the circle in its burrow, covering its eyes. The other children stood in a circle around the Hasja or little rabbit saying:

Hasja in der Grube  
Sass und schief  
Sass und schief  
Armes Hasja bist du Krank  
Dad du nicht mehr hüppsen kands?  
Hasja da hüpps!  
Hasja da hüpps!

Bunny in its burrow  
Sits and sleeps  
Sits and sleeps  
Poor bunny, are you sick  
So you can't hop anymore?  
Bunny, hop here!  
Bunny hop here!

As the last two lines are sung, the Hasja jumps from the hole toward the children. The Hasja is supposed to keep her eyes closed. Whoever she catches is the next Hasja.

#### Datschein: Jacks

Five stones were used as opposed to the tin "jacks" and rubber balls with which most people are familiar. Four stones were placed in four corners and the fifth stone was thrown into the air. One at a time, the four stones were snatched up in the hand and the fifth tossing stone was caught as it fell toward the ground. When this round was completed, the stones were re-arranged with two together, then with three together, then four, etc., and the fifth stone was tossed into the air and caught as before. The more stones in the pile to be picked up, the more difficult the game.

Every girl had her own set of stones, some of which were very beautiful. The stones were found by the girls in the sand hills near the village. One woman recalls that there were many pretty sets of stones, some all white, some a kind of orange color. The girls made little cloth sacks in which to keep the stones.

Ball playing was all the boys did. They had nice big balls like baseballs that they made themselves by putting yarn together in a ball shape and sewing a thin covering of leather around it. They played catch or took turns hitting the ball with a stick. In one game everyone stood at one end of the field while one person at the other end threw the ball to the group. The next one to catch it changed sides and threw it back and so on until all the players were on the side opposite the one they had started from.

#### Hie-Lay

Members of two teams lined up on opposite sides of the field. Between them a pitcher tossed the ball to a batter who tried to hit it toward the goal line where his

own team waited. On the opposite side, called the "Dode End" (dead end) the opposing team tried to catch the ball to put the batter out.

#### Erdeloch: Gringle Ball

Twenty four- or five-inch wide holes were dug into the ground. The first player attempted to hit the ball into each hole in turn with an oak stick. If the player missed the hole or got his ball into the wrong one, he forfeited his turn and the next player attempted to complete the circle, hole after hole.

#### Shinny

This game was a form of hockey which in Russia was played on skates on the Volga River ice and later in Kansas on the ice in Big Creek a mile or so north of the village of Munjor. It was also played in the streets on foot and a tin can was used as the puck. It was a dangerous game and not only led to frequent fights and clashes but to many bruises and cuts from the flying tin can. The name probably has something to do with the bruised shins that often resulted. Rules required that the can be kept close to the ground but it often flew in the air and many players carried life-time cut marks from the flying puck. It is said that old ladies would close their "Laden" (shutters) when the teenagers started a game, as much to cut out the sound of the game as to protect the window glass. There was no net involved and crossing the finish line with the tin can puck was enough for a point. To reduce injuries, the players were usually kept to four on each side.

#### Karotka

The playing field is set up with two 10' X 10' squares 50 feet apart. A level surface is required and the squares must be smooth and even with no stones or obstructions. Straight sticks about 40" long and  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " in diameter are thrown at four pegs in the opposite, far square. The pegs are about 5" long and  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " in diameter. These four pegs, or "Karotda" lay on the edge inside of the front line of the square. The first peg is placed on the ground parallel to the front line, the other three are stacked on top of this with the

topmost one sticking slightly forward. A hit placed correctly can often knock all four pins out of the square but this does not happen too often. The hurling of the sticks, though it appears to be a simple task, requires a good deal of practice. Each team consists of four men allowed to hurl one stick each.

Once one of the pins has been knocked out of the square, the teammates are allowed to complete their turns at half the distance - they can advance to a midway mark to continue their throwing. If the team is unable to knock all of its pins out of the square, the pins remain undisturbed while the opposition tries its luck at the opposite square. This alternation continues until the four pins have been knocked out of the square. The game is then finished. The contest continues until one or the other team wins the largest number of games, generally four out of seven or five out of nine.

To even the contest, after one team has won three matches, its subsequent hurling has to be done from the back of the opposing team which has to support the hurler while in a squatting position. If the score is then tied, the players return to the normal position to play the final, or winning game.

Frequently the favorite throwing sticks were made from broken pitchfork handles. However, people often cut their own and looked for heavy wood from which the sticks were carefully cut and carved so as to have perfect balance.

#### Alte Sau: Old Pig

"Alte Sau" is played with improvised hockey-type sticks, also between 34" and 40" long, depending on the preference of the players. As many as six or seven individuals can play, the number of players determining the size of the circle on which it is played. A minimum of four players is required to make the game lively and interesting.

Small holes are made in a circle, one for each player. In the middle of the circle there is a larger hole. Each player defends or guards his hole with his stick in the hole at all times except when he is using it to keep the puck (usually a tin can) out of the center hole. The "Alte Sau" is "It". It is his job to get the can into the center

hole and past the players guarding the hole. The players have numbered positions ranging from one upward. If the "It" man is successful in getting the can into the center hole the the number one man becomes "Die Alte Sau." It therefore behooves each player to up his number and being a number one is almost as bad as being "It". The rivalry then develops to capture someone else's hole when he uses his stick to ward off the can as it tries to get into the center hole. This capturing of someone else's position becomes the lively part of the contest. If two players get their sticks into a hole simultaneously the sticks are then twisted around each other until one or the other is evicted from the hole.

The contest can become quite animated and in the old days often resulted in battles so that referees had to be employed on serious matches. The winner was the man who was "It" least often. Sometimes a time keeper was employed to determine who won the match.

#### Buck Hopsa

This game was played by adult men and resulted in many painful and long-lasting injuries. Three or four men would line up facing a building wall, bend over at the hip, and lean against this wall to form a sort of platform with their backs at right angles to the wall. The other men would run and jump upon these men to see how many men they could support on their backs.

In another game, one man is blindfolded while other men stand around him. One of these men has a leather horse strap and proceeds to hit the blind-folded man until he is able to guess who is hitting him. The strap is passed around so that the person hitting the one in the middle changes frequently. When the man in the middle correctly guesses who is hitting him, the hitter becomes "It" and must put on the blindfold, stand in the middle of the circle and be hit until he guesses who is hitting him.

These last two games sound rather crude and cruel to us today, but then served as a means for the village men to prove their strength, masculinity, and endurance; if they were not as highly educated as some, they could at least boast of being as strong and viril as any other man.

## RHYMES

Some rhymes are sung to the baby and are called "Koseliedchen (cuddling songs).

The mother holds the baby, playing with it, slapping its hands together in rhythm to:

Backe, backe Kuchen,  
Der Backer hat gerufen!  
Wer will gute Kuchen backen,  
Der muss haben sieben Sachen;  
Eier und schmalz,  
Butter und Salz,  
Milch und Mehl,  
Safran macht den Kuchen gebl.

Bake, bake a cake,  
That's what the baker shouts!  
If you want to bake a good cake,  
These seven things it will take:  
Eggs and lard,  
Butter and salt  
Milk and flour,  
Safran makes a golden cake.

When the ingredients are called out the mother may count them on the infant's fingers.

With the last line, the baby has its arms pulled up or it is hugged and kissed, making it laugh.

Another common type of verse is the finger rhyme. This rhyme is recited while playing with the baby's fingers:

Klafingersche,  
Goldringelche,  
Langhals,  
Butterschlecker,  
Lauseknecker!

Little finger,  
Gold ring finger,  
Long neck  
Butter-taster  
Lice squisher!

## TONGUE-TWISTERS

Tongue-twisters have to do with the sounds of words...lots of s's or f's or h's, etc.  
etc. So, the sayings are tongue-twisters in German but are not really tongue-twisters when they are translated into English, just as many of the poems and rhymes above do not rhyme at all in English if translated literally. A typical American tongue-twister is: "Rubber baby buggy bumpers".

1. Fritz frest fett fleish.

Fritz eats fat meat.

2. Higa Haga Hi,  
Higa Haga Hofferstroh,  
Der miller hot sa Fra Verlor,  
Sucht sa mit die Hunda,  
Die Katze schlag die Drummle,  
Die Meisjer kehra die Ecka Aus,  
Die Ratza draha die Drecke naus,  
Sitzt en Manja uf en Dach,  
Hot sich grunam und schepp gelacht.

Higa Haga Hi,  
Higa Haga oats & straw,  
The miller lost his wife.  
He looks for her with the dogs;  
The cats beat the drums,  
The mice sweep out the corners,  
The rats carry out the dirt,  
A little man sits on the roof  
And laughs himself crooked.